

# University of Pittsburgh Football Media Conference

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## Coach Pat Narduzzi Press Conference

PAT NARDUZZI: Happy Monday. Working on No. 6. I say it every week, our guys have earned something a lot of people around the country haven't done to this point in getting No. 6. Obviously the last couple weeks we've come up a point short, which in my career I don't know if I've ever been a point short two weeks in a row, but we're this far away from really being 5-0, and that's really the attitude we take.

We've got a good football team. We've made a lot of plays on the year and we've missed a couple plays, which everybody in the country does. Surely we'd like to sit here and be undefeated at this point, but that's not where we are, so we've got to deal with the reality. We're going to have to fight through some adversity and just fight to come back. We've got a great team this week in Miami, so another ranked team we get to go face and do it on the road.

Got a lot of faith in our football team. I love this team, and like I said, when you watch the tape from Saturday, probably more than the week before, I think I was more upset the week before against North Carolina State than I was -- when you watch the tape, what pops out to me is attitude and effort. I mean, our kids got a great attitude. They never quit. We're down, it's back and forth, they're on the road. A lot of things can happen; it can get away from you. It hadn't got away from our guys. Very easily after a 77-yard pass, after a two-yard loss where things could just unravel, but our guys don't unravel at all.

Obviously we don't want to give up big plays, but the effort that our kids played with in all three phases is pretty darned good. It's as good as I've been around, and that's all you can ask for as a football coach is your guys are playing their tails off for each other.

Besides that, there's the inches that we've lost, whether it's getting more 1st downs and getting into probably a manageable field goal situation for Kess -- when you talk about missing field goals, a 55-yarder and a 49-yarder, I don't know what the average percentage on a 45-yard-plus field goal around the country is, but if you hit one out of



three of those, which is what Kess did, you're pretty darned good, and a 58-yarder obviously is tremendous and gives us a chance in overtime.

But you know, those are low-percentage kicks, especially on a windy day where you had gusts of up to 30 miles an hour down on the field.

But I loved our kids' attitude. I loved their toughness. But those inches that we've got to get, whether it's we're down on the goal line, it's 4th and 1 on the goal line and Dez has got the quarterback by the back of the jersey and goes to pull him and he starts to tug him and it just lets go, that's what I'm talking about. Just we're that close. He's in perfect position, he ain't getting in if we pull him back, but that's 4th and 1 at the goal line. That's seven points there.

Going back to the field goals, those long ones -- let's get another 1st down, let's get one more 1st down and then if we've got to kick it, at least it's in the 30s instead of the 40s. Those types of things.

And then obviously the fundamental things of I think you guys asked a question on Saturday was it a busted coverage. Obviously it wasn't, but it's fundamentals, and it's technique and giving that receiver something we don't want to give him at times, and I won't get into the details of that, but we've just got to do a better job as coaches putting them in better position and getting their technique down.

Probably the biggest mistake of the day in my opinion is just without Damarri Mathis out there, I think our corners each took 90 reps the week before and 77 yesterday, so you're looking at depth, and we're going to have to -- with the tempo we're going to see this week when we go down to Miami, we're going to have to rotate our corners, we're going to have to keep them fresh, and I did a poor job of making sure that we were doing that, and we were putting our corners out there for 77 plays on Saturday, and that's a long time. Rashad Weaver and Patrick Jones don't go 77 plays. They're kind of like in a wrestling match, and some people differ with you, those guys it's a -- if you've ever wrestled, it's exhausting to wrestle, and you're wrestling in a hand war, in a physical war up there.

But when you're running a ton, that's the other end of it, which I've never done. I can't say I've ever been there.



But I've had linebackers move to D-end and kind of gone, holy cow, Coach, this is different; I can't play 10 plays in a row. It's just different. But I've never played corner, but obviously we've got to be better on the back end.

If we eliminate the big plays and make them earn it -- even the first drive of the game was 14 plays, and we bent but did not break and caused a field goal. That's what we've got -- we just can't give them the big chunks, and we've got to do a better job there, and that's the game really. Some of those little things.

And then one other thing that -- we get one turnover, we each got one turnover. Their turnover is down on our own 17-yard line and the defense shows up and gets another turnover, but when we got our one turnover -- we thought we had three, but we got our one, our offense has got to go 80. So it's where you get those turnovers that are critical, as well. Those inches and turnovers, as well, just some things you just can't control.

But I was very, very happy with our attitude and our effort and really toughness. I thought we went out and played tough, which is really a mark of a Pitt football team.

Again, going to Miami, I'll just step into that because obviously that chapter is closed, but I'm trying to close it for you guys. But Miami and Manny Diaz, obviously they've had a heck of a year so far. Stumbled last week versus the No. 1 team in the country.

And obviously Miami has got a ton of speed. They've got some transfers both on the offensive side of the ball and the defensive side of the ball. One of the best defensive ends, Phillips, is a transfer from UCLA. They've got a safety that's also from USC, I believe. Obviously they've got a quarterback and a right tackle that are from Houston that came together, I guess, a package deal, that are very athletic. So those are some of the top guys, as well. So we'll have our hands full down there.

Rhett Lashlee came from SMU, very explosive, fast tempo. It'll be the fastest tempo that we've seen to date. Be very similar to Syracuse but probably faster. We're trying to think, we've got like 60 snaps of 15 seconds or faster, so that's a ton of snaps, so they're going to go and we've got to be -- main thing is get lined up and be fresh as we can be, and I think that's probably the most important thing.

But very talented four-down again this week on defense. Play a lot of man free like we saw last week, play a little bit of cover two and a mixture of both, and again, very athletic on both sides of the ball offensively and defensively.

**Q. What's the latest on Kenny?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Kenny, he's banged up. But he was a lot better yesterday than I thought he might be. We'll see what happens at practice this week, but the one thing I know about Kenny is he's tough as can be. You talk about nails, that guy -- that last run he had down on the goal line, he's tough, and it's going to be hard to hold him out, that's for sure.

**Q. You mentioned being like this close to being 5-0 at this point, now 3-2. Do you feel like this team should be 5-0 at this point given what's happened?**

PAT NARDUZZI: We can do do-you-think, do-you-think, do-you-think. We aren't. If you make a couple plays you're this far away from being it. So that's what I think. I don't know if I can elaborate on it any more than that. You're a few plays away, and we've got to win it in the fourth quarter, we've got to find a way to finish the darned game.

**Q. Are you worried about the cumulative emotional toll of the narrowness of those losses, especially because they might prevent you from getting where you wanted to be at the end of the season?**

PAT NARDUZZI: No, we're going to take them one day at a time. I'm not really worried about that at all. We've got a pretty resilient football team. We're never going to lose our kids during the season. It's because of the way we treat them every day, consistently. Win or loss, we're going to kind of take care of guys. We're not going to go -- we can't get a guy hurt and then go on the free agency, pick up another corner. We just can't do it. It doesn't happen.

We've got great kids. They're fun to coach every day, and that's why it's fun. If I had to worry about not only coaching and getting us lined up and prepared to play a football game, but if I had to worry about our mentality then we've have a different deal. But I don't worry about the emotions at all. Our kids are in a good place. They were in a good place last night like they were the week before, and our guys will come to play, I'll guarantee you that.

**Q. Just as a side note, the process of traveling, how did that all go for you? I know you had another zero, which is a good thing.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah.

**Q. How was the process of travel?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, the process was good. There's always little issues here and there. But the biggest thing I thought was going to be the plane ride, but it might have been just how we ate and some of the details that we



can clean up, and we'll clean it up after the first time on the road. Just making sure everything is good that way.

But you mentioned the zero. That's half the battle is getting to the game.

But we flew Delta, we had great distancing, social distancing on the airplane, we had some outstanding masks for our kids, so we're keeping them as safe as possible. Dr. Freddie Fu took care of us and got us some great masks to make sure our kids are really just paying attention to details. I think we got a new mask every week. It's nice, something new for our guys every week that they want to wear. It's a different color, different style. But we had no problems with the travel.

Again, you never know how much troubles you have until this week. We'll find out if we went to Boston and caught anything in the hotel or not, but right now we feel good where we came out of there.

**Q. After watching the game, I think you guys were 4 of 18 on 3rd downs. What did you see with some of those breakdowns and why weren't you more successful there?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I forget really our 3rd down percentage, but I think that's dead wrong. I think the statisticians had a bust in the press box there. I think maybe they fell asleep at the wheel. I see EJ turning to his paperwork there. EJ, can you verify that?

EJ BORGHETTI: There were some statistical issues that needed to be corrected, and they'll be updated today, but coming out of the game that was the number.

PAT NARDUZZI: I think there was five of them that we got 1st downs by penalties, holding or whatever. We had one push off -- they call push off this week. They didn't a week ago, but they called one this week on us, which again, is another one of those inches that a week ago it doesn't get called. This week obviously was an emphasis on it. I don't know why.

But Taysir had a great catch down inside the 25-yard line and that goes back, and now you're sitting at 2nd and 25 or whatever. So those are just the little things that we just have not had a whole lot of luck with some of those things.

**Q. You guys have seen two really strong quarterback performances by your opponents two weeks in a row and now you're about to face D'Eriq King. You guys have only lost by one point the past two weeks. You often talk about tweaking your defensive game. Do you think it's still going to be more of a tweaking of**

**your game to address this week or are there certain changes that you're saying, hey, if we do a structural change here or there, that might give you a better chance to win this time around?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, we're going to tweak it whatever we have to do in coverage. We're not going to put in a new front or a new coverage or a new blitz, I can tell you that, defensively. We're not going to do it. If we did it, we'd be sitting here next Monday feeling worse than you feel today. I think that's a recipe for disaster.

I've had different coordinators, I've seen different coordinators through the years try to do that, and from my experience that never works out. Never works out well, ever.

**Q. If Kenny can't go, who would start and how do you feel about the growth at that position behind Kenny?**

PAT NARDUZZI: You know, we'll find out. I don't think you really grow until you get your feet wet. Davis has walked in and taken a couple snaps and been solid. He hasn't had a chance to get in a rhythm of a football game, and then last week obviously Joey came in and took a couple snaps and took us in the end zone, but it was a running game. No one has really seen him throw the ball yet. We were lucky that Kenny came right back after a couple snaps and a series on defense.

I don't know who he is right now, but every week we try to figure that out, and it depends on how good of a week every quarterback has, and whichever quarterback has the best week will be that first guy to come in.

**Q. Have you guys talked to Kenny about maybe trying to be a little more -- use a little more discretion in terms of running it and maybe just throwing it away and living to fight another play because he has taken a lot of hits.**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I mean, Kenny is a tough guy. Last week some people thought when he got targeted that it was a head, but it was actually he had the wind knocked out of him, just so we're all straight there. I don't know if I mentioned that to you last week. You know, when he got banged up, it was on a quarterback scramble. There's nothing else you can do. You'd like him to maybe throw it away if he doesn't like what he sees, but I wish he'd just stay in the pocket and throw the ball because he had a guy wide open even on that play over the middle, if you go back and look at the videotape. So it's just kind of hanging in there. But Kenny likes to -- sometimes he's pulling it on some of the run game and doing it himself.

But the one thing, we're not a team that's having a bunch of quarterback runs where it's not a read, and we really -- sometimes we're reading it, when we talk the zone read where he took it for 10 yards around the edge on an inside zone kind of a quarterback zone read. But it's really more of him like in a scramble, and if he feels like he doesn't see what he likes down there, then he's going to take off, and those are the ones -- it's hard to tell a quarterback, sit in the pocket and take a sack, either, because you guys will be upset about that.

Obviously we want to be smart. You see him slide at times, you see him -- which I think is a good change-up; sometimes you slide, sometimes you don't, and I think that takes the defense kind of out of what they -- even a week ago he slid the first time, then after that every time he's going down, now he's going headfirst for two more yards on a scramble.

But when you're a competitor and you're tough like that, he's going to compete, that's for sure. You saw how he came back. He's tough, and I could tell Kenny to run out of bounds or take a knee. He ain't taking a knee. That's not Kenny Pickett. He's Pitt tough.

**Q. You mentioned the tempo with Miami on offense, how they just run, run, run plays like crazy. Any similarities to UCF and kind of how fast they were?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, that's a great comparison. Syracuse used to be a little bit faster so I would have always said it was Syracuse, but if you had to compare it I would say it's probably more comparison what we're going to feel to the UCF game from a year ago, no doubt about it, and two years ago. That's probably the best comparison for sure.

**Q. Kenny's completion percentage has gone down every week. I think I could be wrong but it seems like he's throwing into a lot of tight windows. Is there enough separation with your wide receivers and opposing DBs?**

PAT NARDUZZI: It depends on if they hold you or not. It depends if you get held or not. There's one time Jordan Addison was like this and there's no call. A week ago we got a call on that one. I always thought when your shirt did this, it was a hold. But we're not going to get separation if you get held, and obviously we can always get better releases, but give those guys credit, too, they're good athletes, too.

**Q. Did the way they moved Flowers around and particularly used him in those really tight splits seem to give you guys some trouble?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Not really. Again, you talk about two big passes. We outrushed them, we outthrew them. We had more total offense than they had, but they had the two explosive plays that we didn't have. We had some explosive, but it comes down to two plays on defense. You stop the run, they had 30 yards rushing, we counted it as 75. You guys look at the stats, whether it's a 3rd down, 5 of 18 or 4 of 18, we gave them 75 yards rushing, which is still way below what we planned on doing because we kind of treat it like the NFL stats, we count those quarterback rushes as passing yards.

You know, it is what it is. We've done a good job. We've got to eliminate the big plays, and that goes down to the focus for 60 minutes. It comes down to the details of your techniques and whatever your job is, and we can get better at that. We're never going to be perfect, we're never going to be flawless, but it's those big plays that we've got to eliminate. If you eliminate those, you take a 110, 115 yards off their total offense, it's maybe an embarrassing day for another offense, and that's what we've got to do. And that's what great defenses do. We were talking a lot about defense, and you guys wanted to evaluate them after three weeks and I told you we'd evaluate them after 11 or 12 or 13, and that's kind of why.

**Q. We saw Davis pop in there I guess it was a couple weeks ago when Kenny had to come out and then Joey comes in. Is that just like a sign of a tangible improvement by Joey, or is that just you guys want to get both of those guys in there, that they both have experience? What went into the decision to get Joey in there?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I think I mentioned it just a few minutes ago, but it comes down to the practice week and a gut feeling of what you're doing well and what you need to do. We've got confidence in both of those guys. And again, it comes down to the practice reps that you do well, and obviously just like in the NFL, your backup doesn't get a ton of reps and you're trying to narrow it down. I wish we had a pure No. 2 right now and we don't, and if any one of those guys ever had extensive time in a real game, then I think you'd find out who those were. But until that time comes, all we can do is base who that backup quarterback is off of practice reps and what they do during practice and how they fit into that defense. If you throw a couple picks during the week as the backup quarterback, you probably aren't going in. And I'm not saying anybody did that, but I'm just giving you the hardest example. It's pretty simple, who's locked in, who understands the game plan better, who fits into what we're doing that week offensively.

**Q. Is Cam banged up, or you just liked SirVocea more**

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**for that game?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, obviously Cam came in. I think he took five plays. He's still a little bit banged up, one of those day-to-day guys that I think he'll be fully operational this week. But SirVocea Dennis is a football player. I love that guys. If we were playing with four linebackers, he's a starter, and I consider him a starter, period. He can go in and play all three positions. He's smart. He obviously starts for us on 3rd down. That guy is as good a football player as you're going to be around as a linebacker. That guy is going to be a future star in the ACC. So it's a little banged up but he was able to go and obviously travel, and our trainers and doctors do a great job with those guys trying to get them back on the field, and that's obviously a plus.

**Q. Do you guys feel like you really missed Keyshon out there in terms of interior pressure and getting off the field that way?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, you miss anybody. Anybody you don't have, you miss, especially when they're a starter. I miss Jaylen Twyman. But I'm not going to look backwards. As soon as Keyshon is ready, he's ready. I miss Damarri Mathis, but that's kind of the cards we've been dealt at this point. Everybody is dealt a different deck, and we've got to do with what we have. That will be continuing. I hope it's more just injury related than it is COVID related, I can tell you that.

**Q. Kessman talked to us a couple weeks ago after he had that rough week and said he talked to a sports psychologist that kind of got him set straight and allowed him to rebound. Was that somebody that was to him specifically or does the team offer somebody, a mental health professional for the kids to talk to when they're struggling?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Yeah, I mean, it's all based on what our needs are. We're going to give our kids whatever they need, and Kess has off and on talked to him all last year and this year. Whatever you need. It's just a matter of talking to someone that's really not in your office daily, and we've got a great one that I've got a relationship -- I've had a relationship for a long time with, and I think he's the best in the country. He's done a great job. He's my assistant head coach.

**Q. If you can take us down on the sidelines Saturday, when Kenny came out of the medical tent, was there conversation about him not going back in and maybe he talked you into letting him go back in?**

PAT NARDUZZI: Kenny didn't talk to me. I don't go talk to

anybody. They don't come talk to me and say, hey -- as a matter of fact, I was shocked last week when Paris Ford jumped back in there because I wasn't sure, no one really said he was back. Dale Thornton, who does an outstanding job for us, came up to me and said, hey, Kenny is ready to go and I said, good, so they went in, evaluated him, and he came out. It wasn't a matter of whether I said he could or he wanted to go. Kenny is ready to -- Kenny is always ready to go.

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